

# Kaufmann Store & Flats

*2312 NORTH LINCOLN AVENUE, CHICAGO*

*PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION*

*SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO  
HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS*

*AUGUST, 1985*

KAUFMANN STORE AND FLATS  
2312 North Lincoln Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

Constructed: 1883 (south half)  
1887 (north half)

Architects: Adler & Sullivan

Lining many of Chicago's older commercial thoroughfares are numerous variations of a common building type, the storefront with apartments above. Built in many cases by first-generation immigrant merchants, these structures housed businesses which were the economic mainstays of ethnic neighborhoods throughout the city. Among such buildings, the structure at 2312 North Lincoln Avenue, commissioned by druggist Ferdinand Kaufmann in 1883 with an addition four years later, is architecturally distinguished as a seminal work by the partnership of Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, whose work is internationally recognized for its impact on modern architectural thought and expression. Of the two men, it was Sullivan who was moved to create a new approach toward architectural styling that was independent of the predominating influence of historical precedent. In addition to his concern for the pure architectonic qualities of structural expression, Sullivan was a consummate ornamentalist who used ornament not only as an architectural embellishment but as a metaphor for structural characteristics. Accordingly, the style and placement of ornament on his buildings reflect his ideas on the metaphysical relationship between ornament and structure. As a rare survivor from the early period of Adler and Sullivan's partnership, the Kaufmann Store and Flats illustrates many of the essential qualities that established their role in the development of modern architecture.

Adler and Sullivan's association spanned fifteen years beginning in 1880 with Adler's hiring of Sullivan. At the time, Adler was principal of the firm he had established in 1879. Adler was born in Germany in 1844, and emigrated to this country with the rest of his family in 1854, settling in Detroit. His father, Liebman Adler, was a rabbi who in 1861 moved his family to Chicago when he became the rabbi of the Kehilath Anshe Ma'ariv (Congregation of the Men of the West). Having begun his study of architecture with a firm in Detroit, the younger Adler gained further experience in the office of Augustus Bauer

here. With the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Illinois Light Artillery as an engineer. At the conclusion of the war, Adler returned to Bauer's employ, but remained only a few months before joining the office of O.S. Kinney. Adler worked with Kinney, and subsequently his son, through January of 1871 when he left to form a partnership with Edward Burling. Like other firms, Burling & Adler was instrumental in the rebuilding of Chicago after the Fire of 1871. The partnership was especially well regarded for its auditorium designs based principally on Adler's proficiency for acoustic design and space planning. The Burling and Adler partnership continued through 1879.

Twelve years younger than Adler, Sullivan nonetheless brought to Adler's office a breadth of experience in architecture. Sullivan attributed much of the influence of his organic philosophy of architectural development to his observations of nature on his grandparent's farm on the outskirts of Boston, the city where he was born and raised. In his autobiography, Sullivan recalls his pastoral experiences in fond terms, effusively noting at one point that "all cows were his friends."

Sullivan enrolled at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1872, but within months sought and gained full-time employment in the office of Furness & Hewitt in Philadelphia. He was laid off in the autumn of 1873 as a result of the national economic panic. Sullivan left that city for Chicago to join his parents and brother who had previously settled here. Chicago's efforts to rebuild itself following its catastrophe two years before outweighed the prevailing economic climate, and Sullivan was quickly able to find employment in the office of William Le Baron Jenney. He remained there until the following spring when he travelled to Paris to enroll in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. While valuing many of the precepts of that institution, Sullivan quickly grew dissatisfied with its formality and returned to Chicago in July 1875.

Over the period of the next five years, Sullivan worked with several firms, though the identities and circumstances of employment with them is unknown. Many of his contacts with the architecture community were promoted by his friend and mentor, John Edelmänn, whom Sullivan had met in Jenney's office where Edelmänn was the office foreman. Edelmänn may have introduced Sullivan to Adler in 1875 when Adler & Burling were working on the drawings for the Sinai Temple, for which Sullivan was later engaged to execute portions of the decorative scheme. Five years later, this experience may have predisposed Adler and Sullivan to combine their complementary talents in Adler's firm. Adler was well respected for his overall architectural and engineering capabilities, yet he apparently recognized the limits of his ability to create artistic compositions, and hired Sullivan to take responsibility for the design work. Although Adler did not take Sullivan into full partnership until 1883, Sullivan's role from the beginning was that of chief designer and draftsman for the office.

The 1870s and 80s was an active period of building in Chicago, but Adler & Sullivan did not initially benefit from the patronage of the city's real estate entrepreneurs until receiving the commission for the Auditorium Building in 1886. Prior to this, their clients were drawn from Adler's connections in the Jewish community and from a small number of former Burling & Adler clients. The office was active but its commissions were limited to

small commercial blocks and residences. By the time of Adler & Sullivan's commission for the Kaufmann Store and Flats, a handful of Chicago architects had gained the confidence of the business community and were designing major commercial buildings in which their experiments with construction technology and architectural form were creating a new grammar for commercial architecture. Burnham & Root, for example, was already established as one of the city's prominent architectural firms through such buildings as the Grannis (1880) and Montauk (1881) blocks as well as dozens of substantial homes for a variety of businessmen who would eventually commission designs from the firm. The office of William Le Baron Jenney, where Burnham, Root, and Sullivan had all been employed at various times, had already designed the First Leiter Building in 1879, and was about to undertake plans for the Home Insurance Building for which permits were issued in the spring of 1884.

In projects significantly smaller than those of other architects Sullivan, as chief designer for the partnership, experimented with the handling of basic architectural forms and materials. As Paul Sprague has noted in his article on Louis Sullivan (for the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, 1982), designs from the firm prior to 1887 were somewhat experimental in their overall handling of architectural form but were nonetheless unified in their visual character.

[The] most prominent [stylistic feature] was a combination of light stone and red brick. Wall surfaces consisted of a number of planes and thus were sculptural. Shapes were controlled by a fairly rigid geometry both in line and plane. Few buildings contained obvious historical references though in general there was the suggestion of classicism in composition and in such details as a pilasterlike treatment of piers. Arches were always round, never pointed, but minor elements such as columns and cresting seem medieval in inspiration. Sullivan's architectural ornament was also stylistically cohesive during this period and, like the architecture, began to change only in 1883 at about the time of full partnership.

These experiments in architectural form on such small-scale commissions as the Kaufmann Store and Flats are significant in illustrating the constancy of Sullivan's philosophy of architecture which would be more dynamically expressed in subsequent larger commissions.

The Kaufmann Store and Flats is an asymmetrical four-story design constructed in two stages four years apart. Although no references identify the architect of the addition, its unified composition suggests that Adler & Sullivan developed overall plans at the time of the initial construction in 1883, but for unknown reasons the complete design was not executed until 1887.

The original portion of the building is the twenty-five-foot section to the south. On the ground floor is an entrance to the upper-floor apartments and a cast-iron and glass shop front into which is set a recessed entry. The upper floors are three bays wide, the southernmost bay distinguished by protruding bricks and stone piers. Floor levels are expressed by continuous courses of Joliet limestone at the sills and lintels. While the incised stonework

above the second-floor windows is a simple detail expressing the load-bearing function of the stone, the masonry detailing above is much more elaborate. Alternating courses of stone and panels of brick give the building a distinctive polychromy. Lunettes over the third-floor windows are defined by stylized voussoirs formed by the continuation of the masonry striping. The lunettes themselves are filled with ornamented red terra-cotta panels.

The fourth-floor treatment of the 1883 section is probably not original, judging from the ornamental detailing of the windows which is uncharacteristic of Sullivan's decorative designs. Although the 1887 building permit for the northern addition also specifies an additional floor for the existing structure, there may have already been an attic story. This is suggested by the fact that the heights listed on the 1883 and 1887 permits vary by only five feet. Further, because other Adler & Sullivan buildings of the period had mansard roofs, it may be assumed that the original portion of this structure had a similar roof treatment, and that the original attic story of the earlier building was rebuilt in 1887 to match the addition.

The 1887 addition mirrors its earlier counterpart in the simple iron-and-glass storefront, masonry and millwork detailing, and the protruding brick and stone piers at the northern end of the street facade. Any notion of symmetry, however, is jarred by the picturesque introduction of a two-story oriel capped by a striped masonry attic bay borne partially on corbelled brick and stone piers. The uncharacteristic ornamental detailing of the galvanized sheet metal on the oriel and the attic pediments make Adler & Sullivan's active involvement with this addition suspect. Possible explanations for Adler & Sullivan's non-involvement range from the office's preoccupation in 1887 with the immense Auditorium project to Kaufmann's simply taking existing plans drawn in 1883 to a general contractor to build without the supervision of the architects, or variations thereof. In any event, if Adler & Sullivan did not work on it, any explanation can merely be speculative.

In terms of its overall composition, the structure is consistent with Adler & Sullivan designs of the period, and it illustrates Sullivan's effort to create an original form of architectural expression based on organic principles rather than historic artifice. Sullivan was influenced by a wide range of social, scientific, artistic, religious, and educational theories of his day. He cultivated ideas he was familiar with through the writings of Walt Whitman, Charles Darwin, Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, and others, and evolved his own convictions for a new style of architecture. He believed in a theory of cultural Darwinism which, in the case of architecture, posited that every building design should be integrated with its time and population and that it should express its cultural environment. Implicit in such an outlook is a criticism of historically based designs as being pedantic. Accordingly, Sullivan developed a highly individualistic design solution to architectural problems, and encouraged other architects not to follow his style but to create their own interpretations.

Sullivan's concerns were for the pure architectonic expression of materials, space, and structure. According to Sprague, such an architectural grammar "transcended the limited stylistic notions of 'historic' and 'modern.'" His approach toward architectural aesthetics in terms of visual balance and rhythm, materials, and carefully ordered plans and elevations

was conventional, and was based on his formal training as well as his experience in various architectural offices. "To Sullivan," Sprague states, "these and other elements of monumentality in architecture were neither old nor new, neither historic nor modern, but timeless and eternal." Yet his stylistic expressions varied noticeably from those of his contemporaries. Sullivan's manipulation of colors and of receding and protruding wall surfaces in the Kaufmann Store and Flats impart a visual dynamism that is unusual for such a utilitarian building type. In relation to similar buildings of the era in which designs were drawn from historical precedent and were often uninspired, the stylistic treatment of the Kaufmann structure is particularly innovative.

Sullivan's organic architectural philosophy is most lyrically expressed in his ornamental designs. He used ornament selectively to reinforce his architectural compositions. Employing ornament as a metaphor for tensile characteristics of construction, Sullivan often punctuated piers and arches and similar junctions with elaborate decorative designs. The early ornamental designs were influenced by Sullivan's mentor, John Edelmenn, who exposed his student to varieties of Victorian gothic and Egyptoid ornamentation. Sullivan re-interpreted these designs, personalizing them to the extent that by the time of the Kaufmann commission their style was truly unique and could only be referred to as "Sullivan-esque."

The Kaufmann Store and Flats is noteworthy in terms of the development of Sullivan's grammar of ornament, specifically in the interpretation and presentation of ornament. In previous designs the ornamental motifs, derived from botanic forms, were much simpler and were set onto a blank background, rendering a static pictorial quality to them. With the decorative designs for this structure, however, particularly that for the lunettes, the relationship of the ornament to the panel is more integrated and the motifs themselves are more complex. Sinuous botanic forms radiate, or emerge, from the panel and fill it, giving them more depth and dimension while de-emphasizing the applied look of the ornament. Such a dynamic presentation of ornament reinforces Sullivan's metaphoric use of botanic forms to represent tensile and compressive qualities of architecture. The naturalistic curvilinear treatment of ornament, of course, became a hallmark of Sullivan's decorative designs, and, as such, the ornamental styling of the Kaufmann Store and Flats presages this motif in other more celebrated designs.

Although Ferdinand Kaufmann lived in one of the upstairs flats of the original section, he apparently never occupied the commercial space in the building, but located his drug store at 2302 Lincoln. William Kaufmann, a relative of Ferdinand, leased the ground floor of the 1887 addition for a bakery. Well preserved throughout its lifetime by subsequent owners and tenants, the Kaufmann Store and Flats, like others of its building type, has maintained an inconspicuous identity on North Lincoln Avenue, an existence which belies its formative role in the philosophy of a major figure in international architecture.

OPPOSITE:

Louis Sullivan's design for the Kaufmann Store and Flats illustrates his concern for organic architectural expression. The manipulation of colors and wall surfaces in this composition impart a visual dynamism that is unusual for such a utilitarian building type.

*(Bob Thall, photographer)*

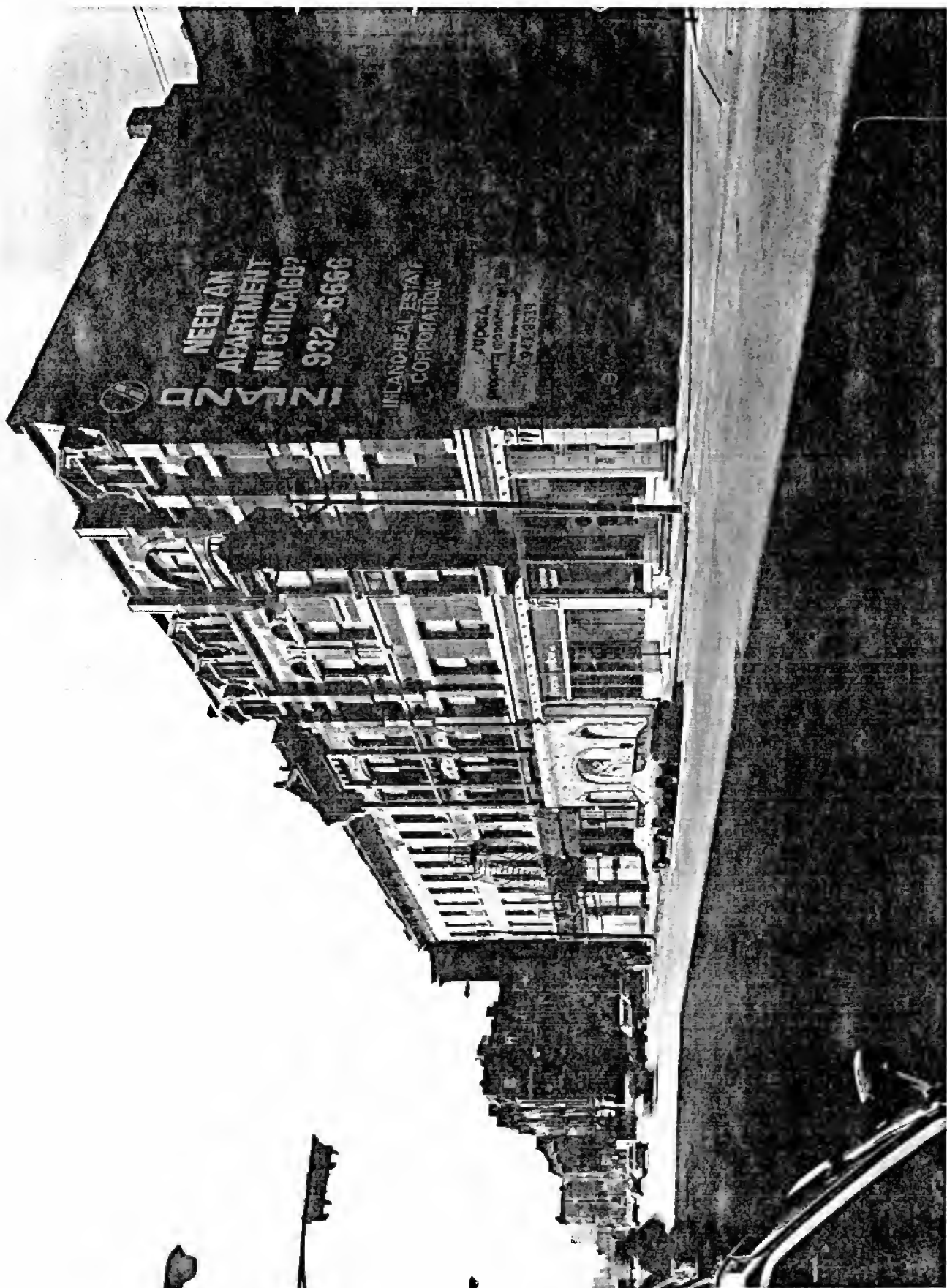




OPPOSITE:

Among the ubiquitous commercial-residential blocks lining Chicago commercial thoroughfares, the Kaufmann Store and Flats is architecturally distinguished as a seminal work by the partnership of Dankmar Adler and Louis H. Sullivan, whose work is internationally recognized for its impact on modern architectural thought and expression. In relation to similar buildings of the era in which designs were drawn from historical precedent and were often uninspired, the bold architectonic treatment of the Kaufmann structure is particularly innovative.

*(Bob Thal, photographer)*



OPPOSITE:

The incised woodwork and interplay of simple geometric shapes is a typical millwork detail of early Adler & Sullivan buildings. The original doors on the Kaufmann Store and Flats are the only ones extant among the partnership's designs.

*(Bob Thall, photographer)*

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contemporary



*The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.*

*The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.*



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